

Honorable G. Murrell Smith, Jr. Chairman and Members:

Thank you for allowing me to speak for a few minutes this afternoon. My name is Kathleen Roberts and I am the parent of a child with profound developmental disabilities. I have been served by DDSN for over 34 years.

My husband and I were blessed with two sons born 6 years apart. They were both born normal or so we thought, but both developed seizures before their first birthdays and were diagnosed with an unknown brain disease. With this disease, they regressed back to the mental and physical age of a 3-month-old child. My first son has since deceased and my 28 year old resides at Whitten Center in Clinton, SC, one of DDSN's regional centers. I have received much support over the last 34 years from DDSN. The boys were served by early childhood programs, public school programs, along with stipends for sitters and support of wonder caseworkers. As the boys medical and physical problems worsened, I was fortunate to have a choice of services to better care for them. I chose Whitten Center as it was an all-inclusive residential facility where my boys' needs could be met under one roof. This was my choice and the one that I am most comfortable with now. I am so thankful that DDSN has provided choices and I realize that the funding they receive must be spread over many services and programs. Do I wish there was more money for each choice? Yes. I am just so incredibly grateful to have a Governor and General Assembly that understands the unique needs of this special population and has continued to fulfill those needs as much as dollars will allow.

It has been said, "The measure of a civilized society can be determined by how well it treats its most vulnerable citizens".

I would like to thank the General Assembly for giving people with disabilities and special needs a priority in the great state of South Carolina. You are truly an example of a civilized society. You have realized the importance of helping those who are vulnerable. Those that have not been given full faculties of mind and body. Those who need specialized services to help them achieve their full potential.

The dollars provided by the State of South Carolina along with matching monies from the Federal government have provided The Department of Disabilities and Special Needs the funding to insure many choices for the care of people with disabilities and special needs according to their individual needs.

Thank you for your consideration of the proposed budget and your support past and present. My thanks to the Department of Disabilities and Special Needs for their efforts to continue to provide many choices for families even in tough financial times. They are truly lifesavers for this special population in the state of South Carolina.

Sincerely,

Kathleen Roberts